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# CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SPECIAL REPORT

MAURITIUS APPROACHES INDEPENDENCE

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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### **MAURITIUS APPROACHES INDEPENDENCE**

The island of Mauritius and its dependencies, scheduled for independence sometime next year, faces social, economic, and political problems which could eventually threaten Western security interests in the western Indian Ocean. The 750,000 people of the 720-square-mile island are predominantly Asian in origin, French by culture, and since 1814, British by administration. Elections to be held this fall will determine whether the long-dominant Mauritius Labor Party (MLP) will rule after independence. A compromise electoral arrangement has succeeded in keeping racial tensions below the surface for the moment. Both Moscow and Peking are attempting to establish their influence, and have footholds in the labor movement and among the youth. Any change in the island's political orientation might threaten the expanding US and British space and scientific research programs in the area.

#### Sociological Pressure-Cooker

The island's main problems stem directly from its racial divisions and its overpopulation. Two thirds of its people are South Asian emigrants or their descendants who have provided the main source of labor for the sugar industry, the basis of the one-crop economy. Hindus constitute 51 percent of the population, and Muslims 16 percent. A long-established middle class is drawn mainly from the Creoles, who are mixed descendants of Europeans, Africans, and Asians. The aggressive Franco-Mauritians --mainly heirs of the island's French rulers in the pre-Napoleonic era--have prospered under colonial rule and, though only one percent of the population, control a large share of the

capital. Persons of Chinese descent--four percent of the total--predominate in the small businesses.

#### One-Crop State

One of the island's major vulnerabilities is its dependence on a single crop, sugar, which provides 95 percent of the island's exports, and accounts for the same percentage of the land under cultivation. About half of the sugar crop is subsidized under the Commonwealth Sugar Act with preferential prices granted by the UK and other members of the Commonwealth. Despite the fluctuation of world sugar prices, the island has supported itself economically without receipt of aid, other than the sugar quota, from Britain or any other country. The

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government's budget has usually been balanced, although a deficit appeared in the year which ended last March. The per capita income is the highest in the African area outside Rhodesia and South Africa.

The growth of the population at a three percent annual rate already is causing trouble, and if unchecked may strangle the economy of independent Mauritius. Unemployment now is estimated at 11,000 or some nine percent of the labor force. About 6,000 additional males enter the labor market each year. The sugar industry cannot absorb such an increment, for there is no more land available. Emigration is largely ruled out because nearby African countries and the Malagasy Republic are unwilling to accept unskilled workers.

The government is encouraging diversification and the development of labor-intensive industries. Its efforts have not achieved much so far because of the deeply entrenched sugar-oriented economic pattern, the unavailability of land, the geographical remoteness of the island and its small size as a location for investment. Many Mauritians harbor an almost superstitious belief that sugar is the only crop which can be profitably grown. Some marginal sugar land has nevertheless been diverted to other crops which have proven profitable--notably tea and aloe, a kind of hemp.

### Politics of Communalism

Mauritius' main political parties follow communal lines. This has produced Hindu dominance.

Prime Minister Sir Sewoosagur Ramgoolam leads a coalition headed by his Labor Party. Although the most broadly based party on the island, the labor party draws most of its support from the Hindus, and most of the Hindus support it. The Muslims' main political vehicle, the Muslim Action Committee (MAC), has been aligned with the Labor Party since 1963; together the coalition controls 23 seats in the 40-member Parliament.

Ramgoolam became chief minister in 1961 and prime minister three years later under a constitutional change. He was born in Mauritius of parents who were indentured Hindu immigrants. A doctor of medicine by profession, he is a moderate socialist in orientation and an avowed supporter of Western interests in the area. He has declined several invitations to visit Communist countries. Although he faces no known challenger for leadership of his party, the probable length of his tenure is uncertain, for he is in his sixties and has experienced considerable illness in recent years.

Militant, low-caste Hindus who wish to upset the economic and social order before independence support the radical Independence Party, which despite

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its name down-plays the issue of constitutional independence.

The European-Creole quarter of the population supports the Parti Mauricien Social Democrate (PMSD). The party's stand against independence in the past few years--based on fears of Hindu-labor dominance--has attracted some disaffected members of the Muslim community, most of the Chinese, and some Tamil- and Telegu-speaking Hindus.

### The Independence Issue

Because of communal differences, there has been more argument over the desirability of independence than in most other Asian and African countries. In June 1965 the controversy produced riots, and Britain flew in two companies of troops from Aden to restore order.

A constitutional conference the following September reaffirmed agreement on the goal of independence, established late 1966 as the general date for achieving it, set scheduled general elections for the summer of 1966, and on the explosive question of the electoral system which would determine the choice of the independent state's rulers, agreed to the appointment of a special commission.

Under the leadership of British electoral specialist Sir Harold Banwell, the Commission recommended changes that would tend to benefit the ethnic minorities. Single member constituencies were to be replaced

by three-member ones in order to increase the chance of the minorities having a voice in parliament. A few special seats were to be set aside to assure further that losing parties and communities would have representation.

The Banwell report, issued in May 1966, only renewed the controversy. The Muslim and Chinese communities objected because the proposals included no specific guarantees of their interests. The governing coalition paradoxically agreed that the plan lacked safeguards for those two communities, and also described it as undemocratic and retrogressive. The dispute disrupted the scheduled sequence of events which was to culminate in independence. Only the Creoles' PMSD approved, but maintained its stance against independence.

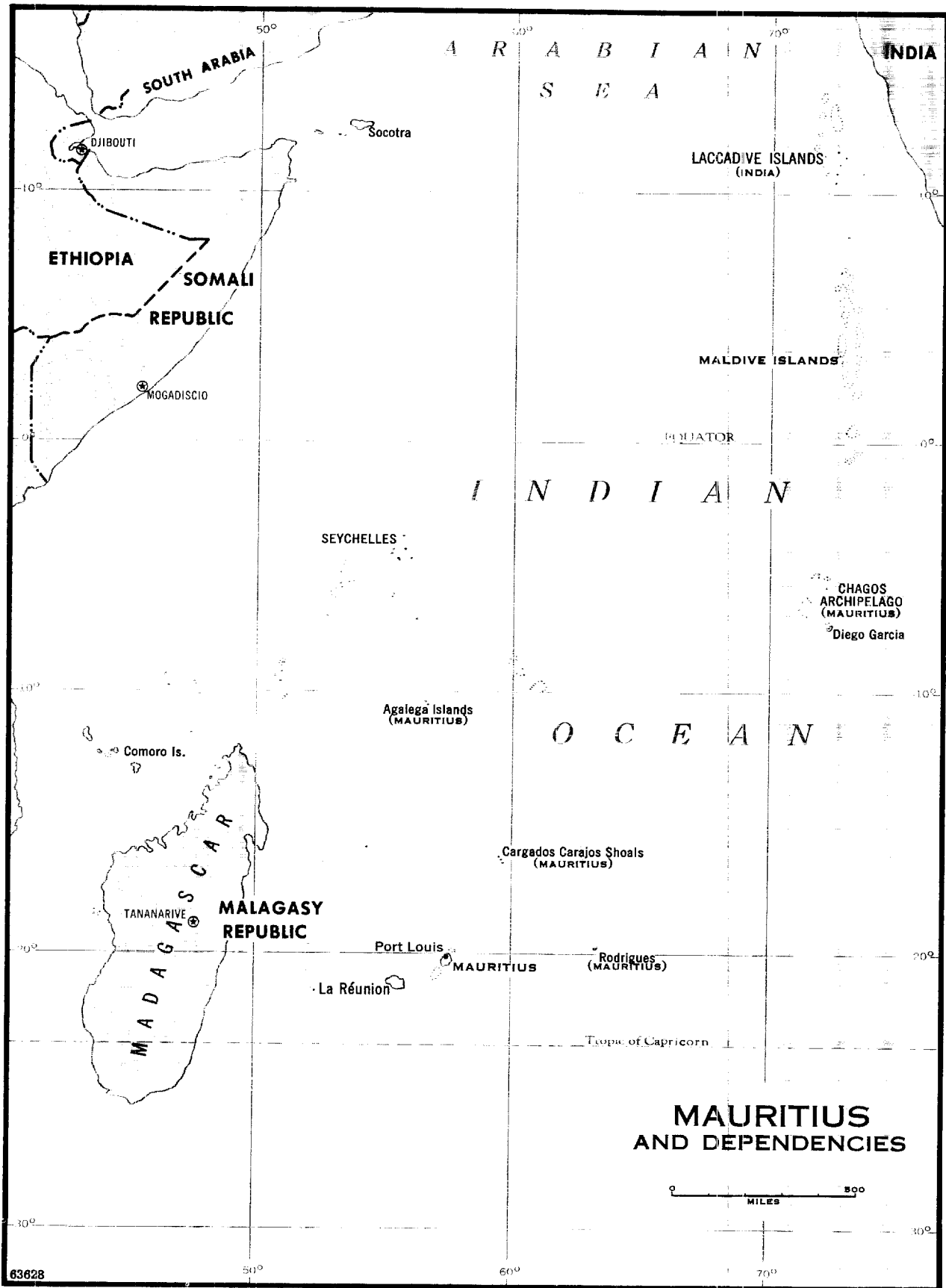
British Colonial Undersecretary John Stonehouse flew to Mauritius in June and with a few minor changes on the method of assigning special reserved seats, secured general acceptance of the electoral plan and restored calm. The Mauritian and British Parliaments accepted the proposals and the elections now will be held according to their terms--some time this fall. Independence is to follow "as soon as possible" in 1967, which is generally expected to be about six months after the elections.

### The Chagos Issue

The Creole-European PMSD also is making an issue of the arrangement announced last

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November whereby Britain announced transfer of the virtually uninhabited atoll of Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago 1,200 miles to the northeast from Mauritian administration to direct British control. The UK announced that Diego Garcia, along with two islands from the Seychelles, would be governed as a new colony called the British Indian Ocean Territory. London stated that it intended to use the atoll as a refueling and communications station along the route to Southeast Asia. Three Social Democrat party members resigned from the government, and the party denounced the deal, in which Mauritius received a compensation of \$7.2 million, as a "sell-out" to the West, claiming that it is to become a nuclear base and a threat to the peace and tranquility of the Indian Ocean.

The campaign does not appear to have attracted any substantial support to the Social Democrats. Nevertheless, other parties felt obliged to express concern over the problem. Ramgoolam's government felt itself under pressure to guard Mauritian interests zealously, and a series of anti-Western denunciations received widespread publicity. The issue is likely to grow in intensity as the elections approach.

#### Communist Influence

The domestic political temperature will rise further if Communist activities continue their gradual increase. Both Moscow and Peking have been quietly penetrating existing youth and labor organizations and organizing new ones.

The Mauritian Young Communist League (MYCL) is the strongest and most overt instrument of Communist influence, with a claimed membership of 8,000. Its main role in dispensing scholarships to study in Communist countries has won it much of its following. Primarily Moscow-oriented, the League maintains contacts with international Communist organizations and often provides delegates to international conferences. The League publishes a newspaper, but has failed in an attempt to register a trade union open to all workers for the purpose of "building a Communist society." Other less consequential Communist organizations include the Lenin Youth Organization and the Lenin Communist Party.

The Soviet and Chinese scholarship programs exert considerable pull on the many jobless graduates of secondary schools. The Soviets and Eastern Europeans have been especially active in cultivating a broad range of labor and political leaders as well as youth.

Communist China operates largely through the local Chinese, many of whom retain close familial ties with their homeland and who occasionally return there for visits. Peking encourages these travels, and also supports local Chinese publications, a Chinese school, a bookshop, youth organizations and an Overseas Chinese Association. Those Chinese who are fairly well entrenched in their bourgeois, middle class life remain unreceptive to these overtures, however.

Moscow and Peking also exert some influence in the island's

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labor movement. About a third of the organized Hindu laborers belong to a union led by an avowed Marxist, Luchtmeersparad Badry. Although he has made several trips to Peking, Badry is an outspoken advocate of Moscow's viewpoint. The Soviets have offered financial aid and advice to leaders of the two World Federation of Trade Union-affiliated unions who have good access to Labor Party politicians. These unions offer strong competition to those which are affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and ideology probably lies beneath many of the jurisdictional battles.

### Outlook

Despite the calm which followed agreement on election arrangements, communal rivalries and fears remain close to the surface and may well erupt in violence again before the elections are over and independence achieved. The Social Democrats' Gaetan Duval

has the capacity to arouse the Creoles and others over the independence issue or again to stir the representation issue. Ramgoolam would react strongly to any seeming threat to his position, [REDACTED]

Even if independence is peacefully achieved next year, social and economic turbulence probably lie ahead. The future of the Europeans and Creoles is especially clouded. On attaining power without British restraints the Indian majority is likely to find an easy target in those who have controlled wealth and power in the past. Disruption of the traditional economic arrangements, as some within the Hindu minority already demand, could bring requests for increased sugar and immigration quotas from Britain or other special aid. Threats to invite Communist nations in to the rescue might also appear in these circumstances. [REDACTED]

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